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ABSTRACT

The Operation Stay-in-School (OSIS) program was developed to reduce truancy before it diminishes the value of the student's education, leads to other problems such as increased burglary, vandalism, and drug abuse, and reduces the school district's attendance revenue. Truants apprehended by police are taken to OSIS reception centers where they are counseled by attendance personnel, and parents are asked to return them to school. The program, operating in several school districts in California, has been credited with reducing unauthorized pupil absence and has also been correlated with lower incidences of juvenile crimes in those districts. (Author)

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Technical Assistance Bulletin 15

Operation Stay-in-School: A Truancy Abatement Program

Summary

The Operation Stay-in-School (OSIS) program was developed to reduce truancy before it diminishes the value of the student's education, leads to other problems such as increased burglary, vandalism, and drug abuse, and reduces the school district's attendance revenue. Truants apprehended by police are taken to OSIS reception centers where they are counseled by attendance personnel, and parents are asked to return them to school. The program, operating in several school districts in California, has been credited with reducing unauthorized pupil absence and has also been correlated with lower incidences of juvenile crimes in those districts.

The Problem

Truancy decreases student's learning time and may eventually result in dropping out or repeating grades, all of which waste school resources. Truancy is also seen as increasing the incidence of crimes such as burglary, vandalism, and drug trafficking and may lead to the student being institutionalized, thus incurring the subsequent costs to the community and society. In addition, decreased school attendance can result in loss of average daily attendance revenue to the school district. The Los Angeles Unified School District reports that of the cases referred to Public Services and Attendance personnel during the 1976-77 school year 8.5 percent were absent because of truancy.

The Solution

The Operation Stay-in-School (OSIS) program has been implemented in several school districts in California as a preventive, rather than punitive, program to keep students in school. The OSIS programs are operated through the cooperative sponsorship of local school districts and police departments. (See the NSRN T/A Bulletin on "Youth Service and Juvenile Justice Networks" for a fuller discussion of interagency cooperation.)

OSIS Program Organization

In Los Angeles, the city police and county sheriff's departments work with the Los Angeles Unified School District. Fourteen OSIS reception centers throughout the district are staffed by a pupil services and attendance (PSA) counselor and a pupil attendance aide. A truant student apprehended by a law enforcement officer is brought to the reception center to be interviewed by the PSA counselor and the aide. The pupil's school is contacted, and parents are requested to pick up the student at the center and return him or her to school.

A pilot OSIS program was operated by the Fresno police department and sheriff's office, the Clovis police department, and the Fresno and Clovis school districts in May 1979 and the program has been continued during the 1979-80 school year. Patrol officers stop any minor out of school during the school day, and if he or she cannot furnish proof of a valid reason for being out of school and not at home, the truant student is transported to one of four reception centers staffed by school welfare and attendance personnel. The officer's responsibility ends when the student is delivered to the center. The officer files a student absence slip and forwards it to the juvenile division. If a truant is also

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charged with a criminal violation, the case is not considered a truancy.

Typical Reception Center Procedures

At the reception center, the child welfare and attendance officer determines whether the student should be returned to school or sent home, or whether other action should be pursued. If the student is currently on probation, the center contacts the probation officer to discuss the handling of the case. A meeting is scheduled with the probation officer, or if the probation officer agrees, an application for petition is filed indicating violation of probation, and the minor is transported to juvenile hall. If the minor is on probation, the probation officer or his or her representative is expected to see the student within 5 days. If the student is not on probation, the center attendance officer sends a copy of the referral document from law enforcement to the school. If the parents or student indicate that there are other problems, they are referred to the school's pupil service counselor.

Results

The Fresno County Delinquency Prevention Commission has noted that the OSIS program in California has been successful in reducing juvenile crime and truancy and in increasing average daily attendance in schools. To evaluate the effectiveness of the May 1979 pilot program in Fresno, the incidence of burglary, aggravated assault, and petit theft reported within a 1-mile radius of the schools concerned in April, May, and June 1979 was compared to the number of these crimes reported during the same period in 1978. The incidence of each of these types of crimes declined, although the study did not consider crimes committed in other parts of the city. The Fresno school district recorded 5,476 fewer absences in May 1979 that in April 1979. In the first 2 weeks of the program's operation in fall 1979, 307 students were taken to reception centers, and 47 of these were also found to be involved in crimes.

The Fresno associate superintendent of instruction feels the program has benefited both the police and the school system. Although the police can provide much more coverage than could the schools, reception center personnel have relieved the police of much of the processing of truants, such as telephoning parents.

The Los Angeles OSIS program was evaluated by the Pupil Services and Attendance Branch of the Los Angeles Unified School District. A comparison of pupil absences during the 30 days prior to and following OSIS services revealed a 43 percent reduction in non-illness absences, saving $13.90 per pupil during the period. The existence of an OSIS reception center in a police area was strongly correlated with a decrease in juvenile burglary arrests. Nine out of eleven police divisions studied showed a decrease in these arrests. Areas in which arrests increased were considered to be those where officers were less enthusiastic about the OSIS program as evidenced by the number of truants processed at the centers. The study's overall findings were that the OSIS program increased learning time, served as a diversion program to keep status offenders out of detention and correctional facilities, and effected a financial gain to the school districts, which could amount to as much as $1,017,119 per year for 12,000 pupils counseled.

Replication Issues

The OSIS program can be organized in any community in which school administrators and law enforcement personnel agree to cooperate.

Required Resources

Cooperation between the school district administration and the police department is essential as the basis for the OSIS program. The location of reception centers is determined by the jurisdiction of the participating agencies. OSIS personnel can operate out of a variety of appropriate existing facilities, such as recreation areas, administrative offices, or schools. No additional costs need be incurred by the police department or the school system.

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